Reconsidering 'Set the People Free': Neoliberalism and Freedom Rhetoric in Churchill's Conservative Party

It is often assumed that 'Hayekian' or 'neoliberal' influences lay behind Conservative attacks on socialism in 1945 and subsequent calls to 'set the people free' in 1950 and 1951. This assumption has had consequences for our understanding of late-1940s Conservatism and for wider interpretations of post-war politics. Heeding recent calls to reconnect the inter-war and post-war parties and to pay closer attention to how opponents and contexts generate arguments, this article revisits senior Conservatives' rhetoric between 1945 and 1951 to break the link between neoliberal influence and freedom rhetoric. First, it argues that the rhetoric of 1945 was derived from a distinctly Conservative lineage of interwar argument and reflected strategies developed before the publication of F. A. Hayek's 'The Road to Serfdom'. Second, it demonstrates that senior Conservatives' emancipatory rhetoric in opposition after 1945 was neither a simple continuation of these themes nor primarily a response to the public's growing antipathy towards rationing and controls. Rather, such rhetoric was a complex response to Britain's immediate economic difficulties and the political challenges presented by austerity. Finally, the article sheds new light on the strategy that governed the party's campaigns in 1950 and 1951. Churchill and others' calls to 'set the people free' stemmed from a belief that the rhetorical opportunity lay in reconciling liberty with security. In that sense, the leadership had moved beyond begrudging compromises with the 'Attleean settlement' and was instead attempting to define a new identity within the parameters of the welfare state.

Keywords: Freedom, Rhetoric, Conservatism, Neoliberalism

Amid preparations for the 1950 election, Winston Churchill sent the Conservatives' draft manifesto to Richard Law, a former minister turned party philosopher. Law was a critic of the 'New Conservatism' associated with the manifesto's chief architect, R.A. Butler, and so his dismissal of the draft as a mere variation on Labour's programme was unsurprising. 'People… will only vote for us… (a) if they are afraid of the future under socialism, and

(b) if we can offer them another theme', he replied.[1] Both Law and Churchill agreed that this theme 'must be freedom', and Law urged his leader to adopt the slogan now synonymous with Conservative rhetoric between defeat in 1945 and victory in 1951: 'Set the People Free'.

The phrase originated elsewhere, but this exchange has a significance for the oft-asserted connections between Conservatives' freedom rhetoric and neoliberalism.[2] Law's attacks on state planning feature prominently in accounts of neoliberalism's influence over post-war Conservatism, and his *Return from Utopia* (1950) has become a way-marker for those seeking the New Right's origins in dissent from post-war 'consensus'.[3] With those credentials, it is tempting to treat his advice as a 'smoking gun'; even if neoliberal economists lacked direct access to senior Conservatives, converts within the party encouraged its leaders to use the emancipatory rhetoric said to reflect neoliberalism.

However, the links between freedom rhetoric and neoliberalism are less reliable than both this episode and many scholars of post-war Conservatism imply.[4] Indeed, Law's

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[1] Churchill Archives Centre (hereafter: C.A.C), Cambridge, Churchill Papers, CHUR 2/89, Richard Law to Winston Churchill, 17 Jan 1950.

[2] Richard Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think Tanks and the Economic Counter-Revolution* (London, 1995), 91-9; Peter Dorey, *British Conservatism: The Politics and Philosophy of Inequality* (London, 2010), 118-23; Nigel Harris, *Competition and the Corporate Society* (Oxon, 2006[1972]), 77-84; Harriet Jones, 'A Bloodless Counter-Revolution: The Conservative Party and the Defence of Inequality, 1945-51' in Harriet Jones and Michael Kandiah (eds), *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History, 1945-64* (Basingstoke, 1996), 1-16. Others link it with 'liberal market' or 'libertarian' positions, and in turn link these with neoliberals: W.H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition* (London, 1983), vol. 2, 309-16; Martin Francis, '"Set the People Free"? Conservatives and the State, 1920-1960' in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (Cardiff, 1996), 58-77; E.H.H. Green, 'The Conservative Party, the State and the Electorate, 1945-64' in Jon Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds) *Party, State, and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820* (Aldershot, 1997), 176-200.

[3] Kevin Hickson, 'Lord Coleraine: the Neglected Prophet of the New Right', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 14 (2009), 173-87; Cockett, *Thinking*, 98-9.

[4] 'Freedom rhetoric' encompasses alleged threats to liberty and emancipatory appeals.

earlier rhetoric during the Second World War provides a cautionary tale for historians tempted to infer similar ideas from similar rhetoric. For whilst Law's wartime vision of a socialist 'slave state' reducing people to 'cypher[s] in the column of a ledger' had superficial similarities with his later writings and with the warnings of Friedrich Hayek's archetypal neoliberal assault on planning, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Law's conception of freedom in 1944 was anything but neoliberal.[5] Whereas neoliberals rejected the 'positive' definitions of economic liberty used to justify state intervention and embraced blind forces as guarantors of freedom,[6] Law argued that 'man is not free when he is standing in an unemployment queue. He is not free when he is the helpless victim of blind economic forces which are outside his control…'. For him, it was necessary to 'control these impersonal economic forces, not in order to increase the powers of the state, but in order to enhance man's capacity for freedom'. Law might sound Hayekian in 1944, but his notion of freedom was closer to that of left-wing intellectuals.[7]

Incongruence between Law's early rhetoric and neoliberal theory could be dismissed as reflecting an incomplete conversion, but this leaves us with the teleological argument that his ideas caught up with his words.[8] It also ignores the Conservative traditions of argument and immediate contexts that enabled Law and many other Conservatives between 1940 and 1951 to denounce socialism's threat to liberty and call for emancipation whilst supporting policies that were anathema to early neoliberals, never mind their New Right heirs. We should instead pay closer attention to what Law's rhetorical history tells

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[5] Richard Law, *Onlooker*, April 1944.

[6] Hayek refuted the 'new freedom': *The Road to Serfdom* (London, 1944), Ch. 2.

[7] R.H. Tawney, 'We Mean Freedom' in Charles Latham (ed.), *What Labour Could Do* (London, 1945).

[8] That Law later endorsed Hayek and attacked the idea that 'political liberty [was] a meaningless abstraction unless it is combined with economic security' confirms that rhetorical continuities hide philosophical differences: *Return from Utopia* (London, 1950), 181.

us: whilst neoliberals certainly used freedom rhetoric, freedom rhetoric was not necessarily neoliberal.

Yet, the assumption that neoliberal influence can be inferred from such rhetoric has underpinned key interpretations of post-war Conservatism. Hayek's influence, it is claimed, lay behind Churchill's misjudged accusations in 1945 that Labour's plans threatened freedom.[9] *The Road to Serfdom* supposedly filled 'the vacuum in Conservative thinking and finally provided Churchill with a message which remained part of his rhetoric for at least a decade'.[10] More broadly, emancipatory appeals after defeat in 1945 apparently show Conservatives adding 'a dash of Hayek to their previously Keynesian tonic' and riding a wave of 'libertarian' rhetoric back to office.[11]

Accounts place more or less weight on these intellectual influences, but the association between neoliberal ideas and the rhetoric of freedom has had consequences for our understanding of late-1940s Conservatism. Few of the party's historians describe the policies that Conservatives advocated in opposition or followed in government after 1951 as 'neoliberal' or 'libertarian'.[12] Accordingly, they attempt to explain an apparent gap between rhetoric and practice. Some simply deny that the party's leaders ever planned to

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[9] Daniel Steadman-Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton, 2012), 69; John Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill and Eden* (Harlow, 1995), 62; Cockett, *Thinking*, 91-5; Michael Kandiah, 'The Conservative Party and the 1945 General Election', *Contemporary Record*, 9 (1995), 34-5.

[10] Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption 1939-55* (Oxford, 2000), 211.

[11] Richard Carr, *Veteran MPs and Conservative Politics in the Aftermath of the Great War* (Farnham, 2013), 179; Francis, '"Set the People Free"?', 58-77. Ramsden credited Hayek with influencing rhetorical strategy after 1945, but suggested Conservatives might have adopted similar rhetoric anyway: *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party since 1870* (London, 1998), 310.

[12] Francis, '"Set the People Free"?'; Mark Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain 1957-64* (Manchester, 2005); Jim Tomlinson, '"Liberty with Order": Conservative Economic Policy, 1951-1964' in *Conservatives and British Society,* 274-88. 'Libertarian' inaccurately describes neoliberal/Conservative views, but analysts nevertheless use it to contrast 'paternalism'.

carry out their rhetoric: they 'talked one language to their supporters and prepared to learn another when they returned to power'.[13] For others, intellectual influences were present, but these were less important than the newfound salience of such rhetoric in the context of the Cold War, public frustration with austerity, and the party's need to attract Liberal votes.[14] Alternatively, some identify a 'reinvigorated neo-liberal Conservatism' leading the party into 1950-51, but detect 'contradictions' between Conservatives' emancipatory rhetoric and their commitments to the welfare state.[15] 1945-51 thus evidences a broader thesis that post-war Conservatism embodied an ongoing 'dilemma' between neoliberal inclinations and the desire to win elections. Each explanation has its merits, but all begin from a shared premise: sincere freedom rhetoric ought to partly reflect neoliberal ideas (or at least related 'libertarian' instincts) and the role of context was to make these especially salient.

This shared premise has also encouraged anachronistic readings of the party's wider post-war history. Used crudely, the attribution facilitates parallels that have Thatcher's speeches reviving 'the libertarian rhetoric of the late forties'.[16] More subtly, it allows the search for Thatcherism's origins to begin with the 'Hayekian themes' of 1945 and for these

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[13] Andrew Gamble, *The Conservative Nation* (London, 1974), 54-86 at 57; Anthony Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government 1951-55* (London, 1981), 18.

[14] Michael Kandiah, 'The Conservative Party and the Early Cold War: the Construction of "New Conservatism"' in Michael Hopkins, Michael Kandiah, Gillian Staerck (eds.) *Cold War Britain: New Perspectives* (Basingstoke, 2003), 30-8; Ramsden, *Churchill*, 164-6; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*, 214-34; Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing, Austerity and the Conservative Party Recovery after 1945', *Historical Journal*, 37, 1 (1994), 191-2.

[15] Harriet Jones, 'The Cold War and the Santa Claus Syndrome' in *Conservatives and British Society,* 242-3; David Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics* (London, 2010), 95-6.

[16] Francis, '"Set the People Free"?', 73; John Barnes, 'Ideology and Factions' in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds) *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford, 1994), 335; David Willetts, 'The New Conservatism? 1945-1951' in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds) *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition Since 1867* (Basingstoke, 2005), 190.

to be indirectly connected to Thatcher via the similar language used by the One Nation group and the party's grassroots during the 1950s.[17] Historicising Thatcherism is an important task, but a neglected side-effect of writing history through this lens is that the words of other Conservative leaders from Churchill to Heath appear artificially hollow when judged against those of the New Right.[18]

At root, many of these readings are by-products of an approach that downplays historical specificity in search of influences, precedents, and ideological blocs. This approach is misleading because the raw materials of post-war Conservatives' rhetoric were not drawn from *The Road to Serfdom* but from arguments that had been developed during the inter-war period by Conservatives from across the party's ideological spectrum. As with continuities between the inter-war and post-war parties more generally, the continuous evolution of Conservative arguments between the 1930s and the late-1940s has gone largely unnoticed.[19] If more emphasis is placed on the arguments that Baldwin and others added to cruder anti-socialist appeals, the full extent to which post-war Conservatives repurposed inter-war arguments becomes clear.[20] We can then move

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[17] E.H.H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism: Conservative Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2002), 220-3, 251-3. Sophisticated accounts still suggest connections: Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Neo-Liberalism and Morality in the Making of Thatcherite Social Policy', *Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), 519.

[18] John Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics 1900-1996* (Basingstoke, 1996), 144-7.

[19] Ramsden did not explore his instinct that this rhetoric 'owed more to traditional ways of opposing Labour… than to any shift of philosophy': '"A Party for Owners or a Party for Earners" How Far Did the British Conservative Party Really Change after 1945?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 37 (1987), 61. For suggestion Conservatives were predisposed to Hayek: Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013), 61. Richard Toye recognises both parties regularly called their opponents Fascists: 'Winston Churchill's "Crazy Broadcast": Party, Nation, and the 1945 Gestapo Speech', *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2010), 661-4.

[20] Only Matthew Cragoe dispenses with Hayek's influence to argue that post-war Conservatives responded to Scottish/Welsh nationalism by converting crude inter-war attacks into anti-centralisation arguments. Cragoe limits Baldwin's influence to 'pastoralism': '"We Like Local Patriotism": The Conservative Party and the Discourse of Decentralisation, 1947-51', *English Historical Review*, 498 (2007), 966.

beyond accounts which stress generalised contexts to show how specific political and economic dilemmas shaped the evolution of these arguments.

Lack of context has also resulted in a failure to distinguish between the common use of 'neoliberalism' to denote free market policies adopted since the 1970s and the arguments made by neoliberals in the 1930s and 1940s. Neoliberalism is best described as an 'evolving, interconnected project' rooted in the attempts of an international group of intellectuals (including Hayek) to revitalise liberalism by confronting both the dangers of state planning and the failures of classical liberalism.[21] However, this 'neoliberal thought collective' never held a unified philosophy and key individuals' views or levels of influence changed over time.[22] Descriptions of Churchill and others' oratory as 'neoliberal' are misleading, then, if they imply an equivalence between influences on Conservatism in the 1940s and 1970s. Nevertheless, the Conservative case that socialism threatened liberty must still be disentangled from the Hayekian assault on planning as it stood in the 1930s and 1940s, if we are to recognise what was distinctive about Conservatives' arguments and escape entrenched assumptions about what this rhetoric ought to reflect.

This article therefore complements Ben Jackson's reappraisal of early neoliberal thought with a reappraisal of Conservative rhetoric. To do so, it revisits senior Conservatives' oratory between 1945 and 1951 and recovers the argumentative traditions and contexts that explain how Conservatives could sincerely use the rhetoric of freedom without adopting neoliberal positions. The article reveals fresh evidence of historically-specific motivations and influences that challenge three tenets of the party's

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[21] Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford, 2010), 8.

[22] Dieter Plehwe 'Introduction' in Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe (eds) *The Road from Mont Pelerin* (London, 2009), 1-42; Ben Jackson, 'At the Origins of Neo-Liberalism: The Free Economy and the Strong State, 1930-47', *Historical Journal*, 53 (2010), 129-51. Despite his reputation for critiquing welfare and Keynesianism, in the 1940s Hayek stressed the need for a safety net and conceded not all demand management immediately threatened freedom.

historiography. First, the rhetoric of 1945 derived not from Hayek, but from alternative lineages of inter-war argument and a strategy that predated *The Road to Serfdom*'s publication. Second, emancipatory rhetoric after 1945 was primarily motivated by Britain's international economic difficulties and the political challenges facing the Opposition. Importantly these contexts did more than just make this rhetoric salient; speakers continually reformulated inherited arguments in response to their opponents and the changing economic situation. Third, senior Conservatives' rhetoric reflected their perception that the opportunity lay not in a 'libertarian' opposition moderated only by electoral necessity, but in *reconciling* liberty with security. Returning Conservative rhetoric to this historical context thus both highlights the risks associated with reading rhetoric as a blurry mirror of ideology and helps us escape distorting metanarratives that misread 1945-51 as a foundational neoliberal moment or precursor to Thatcherism.[23]

Hayek's Election?

Churchill's 4 June 1945 election broadcast looms large in accounts of neoliberalism's influence on Conservatism because its allegation that Labour would 'fall back on some form of Gestapo' can be read as 'an exaggerated version of the Hayekian thesis'.[24] Richard Toye has challenged simplistic characterisations of the speech as a fatigue-induced blunder, arguing that it was an attempt to win over erstwhile Liberals.[25] But whilst Toye cautions against overemphasising intellectual influences and notes the different nature of Churchill's appeal, the links between Hayek, Churchill, and freedom rhetoric remain intact.

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[23] For call to focus on continuities/opponents over metanarratives about Thatcherism: Kit Kowol, 'Renaissance on the Right: New Directions in the History of the Conservative Party', *Twentieth Century British History*, 27 (2016), 301.

[24] Robert Rhodes James (ed.) *Churchill Speaks 1897-1963: Collected Speeches in Peace and War* (Leicester, 1981), 866; Cockett, *Thinking*, 94; Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front* (London, 1993), 383.

[25] Toye, 'Winston Churchill's'.

The plausibility of those links usually rests upon the assertion that Churchill was swayed by the party's Chairman, Ralph Assheton, who circulated Hayek's book and incorporated 'Hayekian' critiques into pre-election speeches.[26] As we shall see, this assertion is not supported by the archival evidence, but it is also unnecessary to explain Churchill and others' accusations that Labour menaced liberty because that rhetoric represented a continuation of inter-war attacks.

Of course, Hayek's arguments were not new when he published *The Road to Serfdom* in 1944, and it is possible that Conservatives read Hayek's inter-war work or that of other proto-neoliberals.[27] From 1938, Hayek supplemented technical arguments that the free market was the only means of co-ordinating dispersed knowledge efficiently with the contention that, even if planning were feasible, the impossibility of lasting democratic agreement about a common good meant that it required the suppression of economic and political liberties. [28] Hayek was not advocating *laissez-faire* or libertarianism; he countenanced action against monopolies and insisted that freedom required legal frameworks. Rather, his necessary condition for freedom was that governments did not intervene or apply laws arbitrarily, as they must when pursuing aims like full employment. However, despite some shared conclusions, the Conservative case against socialism in the 1930s was qualitatively different from Hayek's. It is this parallel rhetorical culture that represents the most likely source of Conservative arguments in 1945 and beyond.

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[26] Jeremy Shearmur, 'Hayek, The Road to Serfdom, and the British Conservatives', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 28 (2006), 309-14.

[27] Hayek developed his ideas in correspondence with Walter Lippmann: Ben Jackson, 'Freedom, the Common Good, and the Rule of Law: Lippmann and Hayek on Economic Planning', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, 1 (2012), 47-68.

[28] F.A. Hayek, 'The Nature and History of the Problem' in F. A. Hayek (ed), *Collectivist Economic Planning* (London, 1935), 1-40; 'Freedom and the Economic System', *Contemporary Review*, 153 (1938) reprinted in: Bruce Caldwell (ed) *Socialism and War: The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek Volume 10* (London, 1997), 181-8.

It is ironic that Conservatives fought the 1945 election with appeals rooted in the inter-war years; the post-war party wanted to distance itself from that led by Stanley Baldwin, and Churchill's own retellings of the 1930s cemented Baldwin's negative reputation.[29] This discrepancy is explained by the fact that the raw materials of anti-socialist rhetoric were never exclusively associated with any one of the inter-war party's factions. Accusations that Labour stood for revolution, which reached fever-pitch in the 1924 election, were quite different from Baldwin's more sophisticated arguments in the mid-1930s, and campaigners toned down or exaggerated the socialist menace depending on local circumstances.[30]

Yet, for all that separated the Conservativisms of Baldwin, the Cecilian Aristocrats, die-hards, and tariff reformers, their anti-socialist rhetoric was usually drawn from a common pool of arguments that individuals tailored to their needs or rhetorical style. Stuart Ball and Philip Williamson have identified some of these pooled resources, but a more distinctive Conservative critique of socialist planning emerges if closer attention is paid to the evolutionary process by which Conservatives combined different anti-socialist arguments into increasingly elaborate attacks.[31] Baldwin kick-started this process; he weaved traditional attacks on socialism together with more sophisticated models of social progress, constitutionalism, and British history.[32] After his retirement, Conservatives continued this compositing process as their targets shifted between 'planning' and the

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[29] Philip Williamson, 'Baldwin's Reputation: Politics and History, 1937-1967', *English Historical Review*, 47, 1 (2004) 127-68 esp. 141-5.

[30] Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999), Chs. 7, 10; Anti-socialism: Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971), 3, 168, 416; Green, *Ideologies*, 119-21; David Thackeray, *Conservatism for the Democratic Age* (Manchester, 2013), Ch. 9.

[31] Ball, *Portrait*, Ch. 1; Williamson, *Baldwin,* Chs. 7, 10.

[32] Williamson, *Baldwin*, 314-26.

wartime Common Wealth party. Hence when the electoral truce broke down, Churchill and others did not have to piece together disparate anti-socialist attacks; they inherited an already-composited set of Conservative arguments.

In part, it was *ad hominem* attacks that connected Churchill's attacks in 1945 with those of the inter-war party. Wartime Conservatives inherited allegations that 'cranks' or unelected 'intellectuals' hoping to impose their views on society had infiltrated moderate Labour.[33] Like Churchill, Baldwin used these attacks to pursue a 'double strategy'.[34] Sometimes he implied this extremism was an inherent part of the Labour movement, but elsewhere he presented intellectuals as a sinister minority who sought to undermine reasonable Labour MPs. During the war, Conservatives extended these attacks to planners. Planning became 'a stalking-horse' for the crank to impose 'fads on his reluctant fellows', and this attack was merged with older religiously-inflected concerns about individuality to claim that cold bureaucratic arrogance led planners to treat people 'as ants' in experiments which devalued human dignity.[35]

A further wave of character assassinations allowed speakers to sound 'Hayekian' more out of this concern with *who* attempted planning than with planning itself. Lacking practical experience, socialist intellectuals overestimated humanity's capacity for knowledge, read the past anachronistically, and arrogantly believed that they had discovered a 'magic formula'.[36] This was not an entirely consistent critique of rationalism. As in Churchill's 1945 broadcasts, inter-war socialists were equally damned for being 'incapable of reasoning from first principles' to discover where socialism 'must inevitably

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[33] CUCO, *Guard Your Savings* (1935); Hartley Williams, *Should the Banks be Nationalised?* (London, 1935), 5; Ball, *Portrait*, 13.

[34] Williamson, *Baldwin*, 318.

[35] Frederick Sykes, *Roads to Recovery* (London, 1944), 3; David Stelling, *Why I am a Conservative* (London, 1943), 25; Precedents: Williamson, *Baldwin*, 292.

[36] Sykes, *Roads*, 3; Ball, *Portrait*, 14.

lead'.[37] In tarring socialists as an arrogant, insurgent minority, the inter-war party was thus bridging older Conservative claims to defend workers' liberties from Liberal elites with Churchill's accusations that Labour's intellectuals, particularly Harold Laski, threatened freedom.[38]

Fortified with these attacks, appeals to human nature and history created two distinctly Conservative reasons why socialist utopianism *necessitated* force. The first was that such utopias inevitably resulted in suppression because societies would resist plans going against national traditions. This was why, Baldwin argued, socialism risked violence and civil war.[39] Short of such apocalyptic predictions, Conservatives argued this nationalistic resistance would at least render planning futile. British socialism would result in a 'dictatorial bureaucracy', but for the fact that 'Englishm[en] would never submit to such control' necessary to impose socialists' plans, putting 'the whole attempt to impose such a system out of gear from the very start'.[40] The wartime party generalised this logic to the 'blueprint school of reformers', who assumed that 'text-book solutions can be imposed' regardless of 'history, characteristics… and mental attitude'.[41] The futility of American prohibition, a helpful parallel when critiquing Labour's social programme, thus represented a specific instance of the general rule that 'if the planned [did] not want it; the plan [was] worthless' and would leave communities worse than before as the 'disillusioned dupes' swept away 'plan and planners'.[42]

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[37] Herbert Williams, *What is Socialism?* (London, 1937 [1924]), 10. Central Office made Williams's pamphlets widely available.

[38] Jon Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914', *English Historical Review*, 108, (1993), 635-9; Broadcast, 21 Jun 1945 in *Churchill Speaks*, 868-71.

[39] Stanley Baldwin, *Our Heritage of Freedom* (London, 1934), 7.

[40] William Paine, *The Socialist Programme* (London, 1936), 18.

[41] *Onlooker,* March 1944.

[42] Sykes, *Roads,* 3.

A second inherited argument reworked the maxim 'power corrupts'. Baldwin's history lessons provided the template. Socialists would succumb to the same temptation as Cromwell, who, having justly defeated tyranny, discovered that he 'could not do exactly as he would' and imposed a system of military governors 'so alien to the traditions of our race' it could not last.[43] During the war, Viscount Cranborne's widely-circulated speeches retargeted this objection at planning. To escape the problem that economic control necessitated 'autocratic powers' that could be abused, socialists presumed 'a breed of men' 'devoid of human weakness'. But 'so far from absolute power bringing out the best in human nature', Cranborne argued, these men would become convinced 'that they were always right' and 'those who disagreed with them were a public danger' in need of suppression.[44] So although Conservatives concluded that control would descend into tyranny, they did so from their own arguments before Hayek's book was published.

Conservatives inverted these attacks to associate freedom with organic evolution. Unlike socialists, Conservatives were humble students of the past who pursued lasting reforms attuned to the nation.[45] In this respect, evolution had a procedural advantage: it enabled the 'blending of the old with the new', whereas utopianism was damagingly non-selective. Socialism, Cranborne argued in 1940, was like a destructive 'spate of water which rushes down a river bank…' before leaving 'the river bed [a]s arid as before'; Conservative progress was 'like a water gate' controlling the flood.[46] This framing was a barely updated version of inter-war propaganda. 1935's *Who's for Revolution?*, for example, assured readers that society must 'evolve', but added that this meant 'steady progress to a better state –

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[43] Baldwin, *Heritage*, 2.

[44] Viscount Cranborne, *Our Political Future* (London, 1943), 2; Ball, *Portrait*, 13.

[45] Ball, *Portrait*, 21.

[46] Viscount Cranborne, *Why we are at War* (London, 1940), 7.

Nature's way', since those seeking rapid change had 'lost also that which they hoped to gain – liberty'.[47]

Baldwin had again nuanced the argument by merging anti-bolshevism with his theme of national identity: a loss of liberty like that in Russia would be devastating because liberty was inseparable from Britain's character, as expressed in its institutions. Liberty was the soil, water and air on which Britons depended.[48] That organic imagery was not coincidental; together with history and evolution it reflected a distinctive Conservative rhetoric that valued freedom not out of utility or abstract rights, but because it had grown into Britain's body politic. That was a crucial distinction because, as Conservative philosophers pointed out, an organic conception of society was as much a principle for resisting Hayek as socialist planning.[49]

In combination, these arguments plotted a Conservative route to the accusation that planning necessitated a gestapo. Because the nation was a 'living organism… functioning through fallible human beings', David Stelling argued in 1943, planning could be 'applied to things, but not to people unless they are treated as chattells'. 'A free people' could not accept an 'oligarchy of doctrinaires' whose 'fixed theories' treated them as 'pieces on a chess board'. Such systems, he concluded, could 'only be made to work by means of a secret police'.[50] Inter-war Conservative arguments could be composited, then, to generate apparently 'Hayekian' rhetoric.

Conservatives could also derive the argument that planning impaired economic freedom from the inter-war period's more concrete debates. Opposing Labour's plans to nationalise banking in 1935, Conservatives defended competition as guaranteeing non-

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[47] CUCO, *Who's for Revolution* (London, 1935).

[48] CUCO, 'In Defence of Freedom', 1935; Williamson, *Baldwin*, 256-9.

[49] Michael Oakeshott, 'Rationalism and Politics', 1947 reprinted in: *Rationalism in Politics* (London, 1962).

[50] Stelling, *Why*, 26.

discriminatory lending since it punished banks that invested on any other basis than the borrower's solvency. Competition therefore enshrined public control over the economy because banks only financed those companies that met consumer demand. As an attempt to control industry via control of investment, nationalisation threatened this public sovereignty with sinister effects. Controlling investment 'in the public interest' threatened that public's 'economic freedom – the right of choice about what we will buy and consume' by removing its ability to channel funds. Such a system enabled rulers to impose their vision on society: socialists might deem teetotalism 'in the public interest' and cut off breweries' credit.[51] In this respect, it is significant that warnings about Labour's plan to nationalise the Bank of England immediately followed Churchill's 'gestapo' allegation.

Likewise, claims that socialism would lead to industrial conscription were rooted in inter-war Conservatism. Statistical departments replacing the market would, Herbert Williams argued, have to create a system tantamount to industrial conscription to allocate labour to industries.[52] Indeed, Conservatives often regarded nationalisation as a stalking-horse for labour direction – an old argument re-impressed upon Churchill in 1943 and which increasingly became a direct appeal to trade unionists.[53] The notion that economic freedom underwrote political liberty was, therefore, already present in the arguments of inter-war Conservatives, many of whom supported state intervention and tariffs that were unacceptable to nascent neoliberals.

This tradition explains how very different Conservatives could deploy seemingly 'Hayekian' rhetoric. For example, David Eccles' 1945 pamphlet, *Your Generation*, linked planning with Hitler's Reich. Yet, the future Middle Way acolyte advocated a 'marriage

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[51] Williams, *Should*, 10.

[52] Williams, *Socialism?* 9.

[53] C.A.C: CHAR 9/192C, Cranborne to Churchill, 11 Oct 1943; Precedents: James Kidd, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 140, 5 Apr 1921, 187-90.

between liberty and economic planning' and used inherited interwar critiques to argue that the latter only became totalitarian in socialist hands.[54] Because 'they [would] not fit their ideas to the passions, desires and traditions of the… country concerned', the Left were 'forced to take violent measures… in the vain and barbarous hope that out of coercion will be born a good society'.[55] Like Baldwin, Eccles claimed that British socialists must rely on violence especially heavily because Britain's historical resistance to arbitrary power meant that minorities could 'force their ideas down British throats' only with difficulty.[56] Thus, the use of distinctly Conservative arguments about *who* wielded planning allowed centre-left Conservatives like Eccles or protectionists like Amery to sound 'Hayekian' without rejecting planning or tariffs.

Conservatives from the party's aristocratic or industrialist wings also used this rhetoric without subscribing to neoliberalism. Cranborne, for example, used the attacks above to conclude that control was a practical not moral question and saw nothing 'un-Conservative' in the infamous Catering and Wages Bill, centralised public services, or the recognition that the 'State must intervene in the life of the individual' in 'community conscious' societies.[57] Furthermore, in speeches condemning socialist threats to freedom, Oliver Lyttelton (often labelled right-wing) conceded that 'consistent full employment must involve some measure of planning and control and direction'. The state would need to exercise 'influence and direction over the timing and magnitude of new capital construction by local authorities, public utilities, and large companies'. This 'State direction' was 'implicit in the Tory tradition' because governments limited freedom 'only

[54] David Eccles, *Your Generation* (London, 1945), 7.

[55] Eccles, *Your*, 4-5.

[56] Eccles, *Your,* 5.

[57] Cranborne, *Why*, 7. Some regarded Bevin's Bill as a step towards a socialist state.

for the purpose of increasing it'.[58] Like Law, Lyttelton spoke through an alternative tradition that justified intervention using conceptions of freedom that neoliberals rejected. It was this tradition that enabled the party's magazine to welcome Hayek's book but dismiss its economics as belonging to 'a past era of thought'.[59]

In this context, we can reassess claims that Hayek inspired Churchill's speeches. Evidence that Churchill read *The Road to Serfdom* is thin: the copy Hayek sent ended up in a cupboard and he was abroad when a further copy arrived.[60] Nor did Assheton help write the Premier's 4 June broadcast.[61] As on every such occasion, Churchill sought his Chairman's advice before his party conference address, but Assheton did not make significant contributions to campaign speeches.[62] This is not to say that Churchill was unaware of the debate over planning.[63] Nor should we forget, though, that his early contribution (which he did not distance himself from) recognised the incompatibility of democracy and central stewardship of the economy, but arrived at the opposite solution to Hayek: an economic sub-parliament.[64]

In fact, the strategy behind Churchill's rhetoric was developed before Hayek published *The Road to Serfdom* or Assheton became Chairman. Churchill predicted that 'socialism and free enterprise' would dominate the next election as early as 1942.[65]

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[58] Oliver Lyttelton, *What Should We Do with the Peace?* (London, 1943), 6.

[59] *Onlooker*, Aug 1944.

[60] C.A.C: CHAR 2/523, Colville to Hayek, 16 Mar 1944; CHAR 2/497, Waldron Smithers to Churchill, 9 Oct 1944.

[61] Green inaccurately cited Harriet Jones, 'The Conservative Party and the Welfare State, 1942-1955', Doctoral Thesis, University of London, 1992, 31-8.

[62] C.A.C: CHAR 9/207A, Assheton to Churchill, 9 Mar 1945.

[63] Laski sent his *Will Planning Restrict Freedom?* (London, 1944).

[64] Churchill, *Parliamentary Government and the Economic Problem* (Oxford, 1930); C.A.C: CHAR 20/101, Leo Amery to Churchill, 11 Mar 1943.

[65] C.A.C: CHAR 20/53B, Churchill to Laski, 25 Mar 1942.

However, the specifics of his 1945 campaign reflected the transposition onto Labour of a strategy agreed on 17 February 1944. That evening Churchill and senior Conservatives discussed preparations for a general election. More noteworthy, though, was their allied discussion of how to combat an immediate threat: Common Wealth's by-election victories.[66] Equating Richard Acland's minor party with 'elementary socialism', the conclave endorsed Lord Beaverbrook's memoranda, which recommended they oppose a 'paradise for bureaucrats' on the grounds of 'individual freedom'.[67] 'Common ownership' – 'only a new word for "nationalisation"' – meant that 'officialdom would be larger than ever after the war; the country would be permanently controlled and held down by orders, decrees and regulations galore; and our way of life completely dominated by State officials'.[68] The memoranda suggested Churchill's 21 March 1943 broadcast as a template and picked out warnings that reflected inter-war arguments: 'We must be aware of trying to build a society in which nobody counts for anything except a politician or an official… I say 'trying to build' because of all races in the world our people would be the last to consent to being governed by a bureaucracy. Freedom is their lifeblood'.[69] With significant input from Lyttelton and Lords Keynes and Cherwell, the drafts of this broadcast had defined 'totalitarianism' as 'a state in which all industry is planned, initiated, built up and run by committees of officials and civil servants'.[70] Senior Conservatives, therefore, had formulated an anti-socialist strategy centred on freedom before Assheston or Hayek became widely influential.

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[66] C.A.C: CHAR 2/507, 'Meeting at 10 Downing Street', 17 Feb 1944.

[67] C.A.C: CHAR 2/507, 'Analysis of Richard Acland's Book', c. Jul 1943.

[68] C.A.C: CHAR 2/507, 'Paradise for Bureaucrats', c. Jul 1943.

[69] Churchill, *A Four Years' Plan for Britain* (London, 1943), 6.

[70] C.A.C: CHAR 9/193A.

Several factors suggest that the rhetoric of 1945 stemmed from a generalization of this strategy. First, its focus on nationalisation suited a party that had portrayed planning as a mere rebranding of the former. *The Onlooker*, for example, had in 1942 accused Labour's interim report on reconstruction of this rebranding before comparing it with Mein Kampf.[71] Second, Churchill believed that an exaggerated vision of nationalisation stood the best chance of alarming the 'enormous vote unattached to any particular party'.[72] His task, therefore, was to inflate Labour's plans and explain their threat. To do so, he merely needed to transpose onto Labour those inter-war arguments recently revived to attack Common Wealth. Indeed, the specifics of Churchill's attacks closely mirrored allegations in party publications that Acland favoured a gestapo and industrial conscription.[73] The Conservative strategy was consistent, but the electoral truce had masked its target.

Churchill wrote most of his 1945 broadcasts himself, but Geoffrey Lloyd provided the outline notes that tailored this wider strategy in response to immediate contexts. Lloyd's influence as Minister for Information has gone unrecognised, but his involvement represented a direct link with the inter-war leadership.[74] Lloyd urged that 'apart from the untimeliness of experiments with Socialism, great emphasis must be laid on its threat to individual liberty'. He acknowledged the dilemma that necessitated this attack: Labour's conflation of peacetime socialism with the war economy made attacks on its efficiency difficult. The case against socialism would therefore be made through principled attacks on its long-term effects. Although 'certain tenets of Socialism' had helped bring victory, Lloyd argued, they had also 'involved the loss of liberty which we know they inevitably

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[71] *Onlooker*, Apr 1942.

[72] C.A.C: CHAR 9/209B, Churchill to Margesson, 9 Jul 1945.

[73] *Onlooker*, Feb 1944.

[74] Lloyd was Baldwin's Private Secretary (involved in speech-writing) and his Parliamentary Secretary. M.C. Curthoys, 'Lloyd, Geoffrey', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2013).

must. It is physically impossible for a State to take control of the industrial and economic life of a nation without also taking control of the people'. If Churchill could debunk talk of public ownership representing 'the will of the people' and let those sick of wartime restrictions 'understand that Socialism is inseparable from control', the electorate would reject Labour.[75] For sure, many neoliberals would have concurred, but Lloyd's notes indicate arguments that were constructed in response to opponents' rhetoric and contain little that Lloyd had not advocated in 1943 when he welcomed a combination of private and state enterprise.[76] Whilst Hayek's book was a convenient context for the *reception* of Conservative oratory, then, we should not conflate apparently similar rhetoric with influence.

Set the People Free

The same assumption of neoliberal influence has simplified the role of economic and political contexts in generating Conservative oratory after 1945. The rhetoric of freedom certainly gained a newfound saliency from the emerging Cold War, and the party did develop targeted appeals around Liberal votes and decentralisation. However, from 1947, Britain's macroeconomic difficulties dominated Churchill's domestic statements. Often responding to requests for speech material, Reginald Maudling and others persuaded their leader that Britain's reliance on further (uncertain) American aid stemmed from several interrelated problems: lacklustre production, haemorrhaging currency reserves, and domestic inflation.[77] This diagnosis had two rhetorical implications. First, uncertainty confined speeches to negative attacks, which aimed to convert economic difficulties into

[75] Marked 'Given to Mr Churchill by Mr Geoffrey Lloyd': C.A.C: CHAR 9/208A, 'General Election Issues Note for Mr Lloyd'. Original emphasis.

[76] *Onlooker*, Nov 1943.

[77] C.A.C: CHUR 5/11C, Crowther to Churchill, Mar 1947.

a 'crisis of purpose and effort' that could be laid at the government's door.[78] Squandering the American loan on 'indulgences', Labour 'were too busy planning… their brave new world of controls and queues, of hordes of officials and multitudes of regulations' and 'paralysing' nationalisation schemes.[79] Senior Conservatives emphasised the ideological implications of Labour's policies and juxtaposed these with freedom, then, partly because their strategy aimed to convict Labour of pursuing partisan doctrine during a national crisis.[80]

Second, the conviction that Britain needed to narrow its trade imbalance by increasing production through longer hours and lower wages fuelled emancipatory rhetoric; 'set the people free' was primarily a cry for *production* and, therefore, emanated from different imperatives than neoliberal objections to planning or the slogan's subsequent association with the abolition of rationing.[81] This focus on productivity directly informed pledges to cut oppressive bureaucracy and taxation.[82] Lord Woolton, for example, urged Churchill to argue that 'to get production' (the country's 'major problem') Britons' initiative and enterprise must be freed from 'a group of inexperienced men… trying to control and regulate and regiment the productive powers of the country'.[83] Freeing the people was a response to perceived economic weakness and a means of pinning lacklustre production on the Government.

Understood as a narrower response to Britain's economic failings, we need not characterise this rhetoric as feigned. Certainly, the electoral risks associated with the cure

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[78] C.A.C: CHUR 5/11C, Maudling to Churchill, 5 Mar 1947.

[79] C.A.C: CHUR 5/13B, Blenheim Palace Speech, 4 Aug 1947; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*, 207.

[80] C.A.C: CHUR 5/13B, Maudling to Churchill, 21 Jul 1947.

[81] 'Set the People Free' primarily concerned production and nationalisation: C.A.C: CHUR 5/29B, Broadcast, 14 Feb 1948.

[82] Crowther to Churchill, Mar 1947; C.A.C: CHUR 2/94A, Briefing to Candidates, 23 Jun 1950.

[83] C.A.C: CHUR 5/14A-F, Woolton to Churchill, 30 Sep 1947.

for productive malaise – incentivising tax cuts – required careful management. The 'drastic reduction of government expenditure' needed to finance them could lend credence to Labour's charge that Conservatives coveted a return to the 1930s.[84] However, because calls for incentives dovetailed with growing opinion that excessive spending and over-taxation were inflationary, Conservatives were sincerely committed to the retrenchment their rhetoric implied. In March 1948, for example, senior figures in the party agreed that the need for tax cuts (on overtime to incentivise production) and a budget surplus necessitated a big 'reduction in government expenditure'.[85]

Furthermore, an *aide memoire*, written by Churchill prior to the 1947 party conference, demonstrates that these economic prescriptions lay behind his rhetoric.[86] His 'positive steps' included reducing spending on houses, schools and railways, eliminating housing and food subsidies, and introducing 'longer hours in industry' alongside incentivising tax cuts to raise production. Few of these plans made it into his conference address uncamouflaged, and, despite openly calling for fiscal restraint, Conservatives left the extent and location of cuts deliberately vague. Nevertheless, Churchill had policies to justify his emancipatory calls.

Churchill's speech drafts also confirm that extended metaphors of release represent his efforts to translate economic prescriptions from the 'jargon of the times' ('disinflation with less, not more, tax disincentives') into 'homely' terms ('government must spend less and encourage the tryers to try more') and then into evocative rhetoric ('the life thrust of the British nation, if not impeded, is magnificent').[87] Importantly, though, specific economic problems motivated this rhetoric, not abstract philosophies of the state.

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[84] C.A.C: CHUR 5/13E, Majorie Maxse to Churchill, 14 Aug 1947.

[85] C.A.C: CHUR 2/51, Financial and Industrial Policy Meeting, 23 Mar 1948.

[86] C.A.C: CHUR 5/14A-F, 'Notes'.

[87] C.A.C: CHUR 5/27A, Devaluation Notes, 28 Sep 1949.

Nor was the relationship between freedom rhetoric and rationing straightforward. As Zweiniger-Bargielowska showed, Conservatives continued to frame rationing and licencing as curtailing freedom.[88] Yet, her account requires an important caveat: insiders considered anti-austerity rhetoric problematic, even dangerous. Party officials like Henry Hopkinson, joint Director of CRD in 1947, found it 'impossible to produce a list of controls which we would remove apart from the one or two big ones… already indicated'. Further suggestions were 'not examples of controls but examples of bad administration…'.[89] Insiders were also sceptical about the electoral value of decontrol, imagining an electorate suspicious of the Conservative policy's impact on the cost of living.[90] Even in late 1947, calls to abolish food subsidies and return to price mechanisms were 'doing the Party a great deal of harm', and Hopkinson continued to fret that, if Labour reduced controls, rising commodity prices would affect the 'rentier class – the vote we want', exposing 'the anti-control party' to 'as much, if not more obloquy as the Government'.[91] Instead, propaganda should 'desist' from advocating 'further control cuts except those of a stupidly bureaucratic nature'.[92]

Such limited scope for attack encouraged speakers to frame controls as restrictions on liberty. 'Freedom' enabled principled resistance to controls as a socialist plot, but also remained suitably vague.[93] This risked confusion. Where Zweiniger-Bargielowska finds

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[88] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*, 214-26.

[89] Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter B.L.O), Conservative Party Archive, Conservative Central Office (hereafter CCO), CCO 600/17/2, Henry Hopkinson to E.D. O'Brien, 17 Dec 1947; B.L.O: CCO 600/17/9, Tactical Committee Minutes (hereafter TCM), 18 Nov 1947.

[90] B.L.O: CCO 600/17/2: John Luanty to E.D.O'Brien, 2 Feb 1948; CCO 600/17/11, TCM, 29 Nov 1949.

[91] B.L.O: CCO 600/17/9, TCM, 23 Dec 1947.

[92] B.L.O: CCO 600/17/5, Hopkinson to Chapman-Walker, 27 Oct 1948.

[93] Speakers requested specifics: B.L.O: CCO 600/17/9, TCM, 18 Nov 1947; Mixed messages: 'Two MPs on Freedom', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Jun 1946.

freedom balanced with 'reassurance', contemporaries saw credibility gaps: the use of emancipatory 'generalities' was leading to 'the absurdity that the Conservative propaganda is occupied most of [the] time in explaining away its own slogans. We shall abolish controls, but shall not abolish the important ones... No one believes us'.[94] Only in mid-1948 did Maudling believe Churchill's signature rhetoric was viable; previously he feared that the electorate was 'more inclined to believe the Socialist story that Conservatives would lift controls too soon'.[95] Far from using 'every opportunity to exploit discontent', then, for much of their time in opposition, anti-austerity oratory reflected an uncertain leadership seeking refuge in the vague rhetoric of release.[96]

Similarly, although wartime attacks on nationalisation continued, Conservatives adjusted their arguments pragmatically. Where state ownership appeared popular and irreversible, they focussed on specific threats to liberty.[97] But where they advocated reversal, such as with steel, Conservatives accused Labour of imprisoning a previously efficient sector and campaigned to 'Set Steel Free'.[98] This double strategy helped Conservatives avoid internal divisions over specific cases and befriend rival industries whilst sidestepping discussions about regulation that might tie their hands.[99] Once again, 'freedom' afforded ambiguity.

Furthermore, the Opposition's arguments were shaped by Labour's rhetoric. Briefings on the 1948 Steel Bill illuminate this process.[100] Central to Labour's case would

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[94] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity*, 229; C.A.C: CHUR 2/84A, Douglas Jerrold, 'Conservatives and the Electorate', Apr 1949.

[95] C.A.C: CHUR 2/69B, Maudling to Churchill, 22 Jun 1948.

[96] Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Rationing', 186; Continuing pessimism/uncertainty: C.A.C: CHUR 2/81A, 'Summary of 1922 Committee', 27 Feb 1949; CHUR 2/17, Public Opinion Summary, Nov 1949.

[97] E.g. Coal Board's powers: Parliamentary Debates (Commons) 422, 14 May 1946, 1721.

[98] Anthony Eden, 'The Right Road for Britain', *Listener*, 28 Jul 1949.

[99] C.A.C: CHUR 2/8B, 'Nationalisation of Inland Transport'.

[100] C.A.C: CHUR 2/79A, 'Iron and Steel Bill Brief', 10 Nov 1948.

be 'the power argument', which accused steel magnates of ransoming the nation. In reply, MPs should invert Labour's point to show 'economic power is two-edged'. Whilst industrialists may have held power in the past, the government's 'vast and growing power… over every phase of our economic life' was now more alarming. Moreover, debaters should highlight the extent of those ministerial powers to exploit the government's 'dilemma', whereby it wanted to publicly downplay the extent of change, but risked 'infuriat[ing] the extreme left' if this was true.[101] Freedom rhetoric, therefore, represented interactions between traditions of argument and live political scenarios, in which a mix of necessary ambiguity and perceived weaknesses determined those arguments summoned to counter opponents' likely tactics.

That the intensity and emphasis of freedom rhetoric altered with changes in economic and political contexts suggests that these environments drove rhetoric. In particular, senior Conservatives' rhetoric was sensitive to fluctuations in the perceived immanency of a currency crisis and the nature of Britain's export difficulties. By January 1948, Maudling believed that 'tactics based on the assumption of a financial crash [were] liable to fail' because reserves would probably hold until Marshall Aid arrived. Rather than an immediate cataclysm, Britain's problems lay in the near future. Meanwhile, the economic challenge had shifted from output to selling goods at British prices: 'politically, therefore, the problems which are most likely to determine the next Election… [are] how in the long run to reduce costs and prices to the level necessary for competitive efficiency'.[102] Both changes reoriented freedom rhetoric. The revised outlook forced Conservatives to emphasise the longer-term fallacy of Britain living beyond her export

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[101] 'Iron'.

[102] C.A.C: CHUR 5/16A, 'Current Political Situation', 17 Jan 1948; CHUR 2/51, 'Economic Situation Meeting', 1 Apr 1949.

means and incorporate an expected period of stability into their narratives. Their rhetorical solution was to accuse Labour of relying on free enterprise America to finance social services (and socialism) in 'artificial Britain'.[103] Attlee was using welfare and inflated wages 'to obscure the real facts of our economic situation' when Britain was dependent on the charity of a country whose system of economic freedom her government deplored.[104] Thus, generating a contrast between shackled Britannia and her liberated benefactor became the typical function of freedom rhetoric. Likewise, the benefits of freeing industry gradually transitioned. Whereas in 1946 Churchill argued that nationalisation inhibited production, his 1950 broadcasts had nationalisation pushing up overheads and prices.[105]

The interaction of these shifting economic and political contexts with freedom rhetoric generated feedback loops, whereby further emancipatory rhetoric was required to fill gaps identified in the first wave of arguments. We shall see below that Conservatives did not regard welfare and economic freedom as ultimately incompatible, but in the near-term the imperatives behind Conservative rhetoric generated an apparent paradox: the party now promised to both maintain social security and introduce liberating incentives, even though financing the latter implied cuts to the former. As Maudling admitted, the party 'was not wholly honest… and had refrained from speaking with complete bluntness' to avoid the Socialists 'trap[ping] us into saying that there must be such a reduction in the standard of living'. Whilst 'criticising the excessive rate of government expenditure' generally, it had never been 'led into specific proposals for cutting social services expenditure', and Central Office had advised speakers to avoid naming specific cuts.[106] To

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[103] C.A.C: CHUR 2/60, 'Ideas for Manchester', Nov 1947.

[104] C.A.C: CHUR 2/69B, Maudling to Churchill, 22 Jun 1948; Lord Woolton quoted in: *Manchester Guardian*, 1 May 1948.

[105] Broadcast 17 Feb 1950 reprinted in: *Listener*, 23 Feb 1950.

[106] C.A.C: CHUR 2/11, Memoranda to Speakers, 11 Jul 1947.

square the circle, the party had taken 'the line that government expenditure can be reduced without noticeable discomfort… if only the government conducted their affairs more efficiently'.[107] Thus, freeing the people was rather disingenuously plugging a budget shortfall when speakers insisted that cutting away the 'swaddling clothes of unnecessary officialdom' would 'give us a chance of reduced taxation and greater incentives' without 'cutting the social services'.[108] In this sense, the rhetoric of freedom became self-sustaining: release from bureaucracy was required to pay for the first wave of economic liberation.

Conservatives largely maintained this façade through to 1951, but historians of the period often detect a firmer commitment to emancipation, which they interpret as a swing towards neoliberalism or a response to public dissatisfaction with controls. Maudling's memoranda reveal a more complex story, however. By October 1949, Maudling believed that public opinion had hardened behind a final resolution to Britain's international economic problems following devaluation. Conservatives could therefore afford greater transparency about cuts; indeed, not doing so risked Labour's move towards retrenchment outflanking them. The leadership should now announce that alongside reductions in social services and selective benefits, Britons would have to work harder with their wages held down. Cutting taxes, reversing nationalisation, reducing control over industry, and tackling restrictive labour practices, would then ensure Britain's competitiveness.[109] Similar thinking was clarifying across the party: Macmillan argued for 'economies of at least twice the order now proposed' to consolidate sterling and defeat inflation with 'additional cuts… to allow for incentives to production'.[110] So although tactical reservations ultimately prevented most of these measures becoming public, some substance lay behind

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[107] C.A.C: CHUR 2/84, 'Political Situation' 6 Oct 1949.

[108] B.L.O: CCO 600/17/11, TCM, 26 Jul 1949.

[109] 'Political Situation', 6 Oct 1949.

[110] C.A.C: CHUR 2/84B, Macmillan to Churchill, 26 Oct 1949.

Conservatives' rhetoric.[111] These measures, however, were primarily concerned with sterling, production, and inflation, not rationing.

Nevertheless, proto-neoliberalism should not be read into these plans, which sat alongside other solutions like tariff zones that early neoliberals rejected. Increasing emphasis on emancipation did not signal ideological change; Maudling's point was that devaluation rendered existing solutions politically viable.[112] Indeed, the policy statement sometimes said to herald a swing towards neoliberalism, *The Right Road for Britain* (1949), was not what it seemed.[113] The emancipatory rhetoric accompanying its launch represented a post-authorship change in emphasis to deflect criticism that it paid 'too much adherence to the notion of a planned economy'.[114] Therefore, the most likely explanations for the varying intensity of freedom rhetoric are immediate political and economic contexts, not ideology.

Liberty and Security Reconciled

Because their rhetoric expressed solutions to the problems arising from these contexts, senior Conservatives did not regard freeing the people, full employment and the welfare state as competing objectives. Granted, the dangers of public opinion and Labour's attacks gave the leadership pause about whether it was good politics to admit the cuts and decontrol necessary to liberate British production, but this did not mean that Conservatives saw economic freedom in contradiction with their stated aims in welfare or employment policy in the long run. In the context of expected unemployment, possible further devaluation, and their conviction that present social services relied upon temporary

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111 C.A.C: CHUR 5/30A, Mark Chapham-Walker, 'Socialist Propaganda', 16 Jan 1950.

112 C.A.C: CHUR 5/27E, Maudling to Churchill, 27 Oct 1949; Ramsden, *Churchill*, 166.

113 Tim Bale, *The Conservatives Since 1945: The Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford, 2012), 34-5.

114 C.A.C: CHUR 2/88, 'Statement of Policy: Comments from Ralph Assheton'.

American aid, Conservatives argued that industrial liberation was necessary to achieve social-democratic ends.[115] Those drawing up the *Industrial Charter*, for example, were adamant that plans for employment and social security were 'meaningless' without the improved productivity resulting from the incentives that freedom rhetoric implied.[116] Two years later, Macmillan privately urged that Conservatives 'must give an absolute pledge' they would not permit the mass unemployment and poverty associated with "the jungle economy". 'But', he added, only a revival of 'incentive and ambition' would create the necessary wealth to 'make this pledge effective'. Conservatives like Macmillan used the rhetoric of freedom and were committed to the incentives and spending cuts this implied. Yet, because this rhetoric drew upon party traditions and was motivated by concerns about production, it sat alongside advocacy of protectionism, plans for an Industrial Parliament, a universal state-paid wage, and Macmillan's belief that 'man is both an individual and a social unit'.[117]

This remained the case after the 1950 election. Memoranda circulated in July accepted a gradation between *laissez-faire* and collectivism and declared full employment a duty of government. The latter depended, however, 'in the long run, not on restrictions, but on abundance, and abundance comes from enterprise and is fed by freedom'.[118] Although some social services would see short-term reductions to finance the increased production necessary for their survival, Conservative leaders subscribed to a different set of priorities (production for social services) than those of Waldron Smithers or post-war Richard Law, both of whom insisted that the welfare state was fundamentally incompatible

[115] Jones acknowledged these arguments but maintained Hayekian rhetoric showed Conservatives were not 'reconciled to the "welfare state"': 'Inequality', 5-6.

[116] C.A.C: CHUR 2/53, James Stuart to R.G Casey, Feb 1947.

[117] C.A.C: CHUR 2/84B, Macmillan, 'Proposals', 18 Jan 1949.

[118] C.A.C: CHUR 2/105, 'Principles', 24 Jul 1950.

with capitalism and a burden on production.[119] 1940s Conservatism did not regard the financing of social services and greater economic freedom as inherently conflicting principles, even if both aims would compete for resources in the short-term.

Consequently, rather than sitting awkwardly alongside each other, liberation and commitments to full employment and welfare were presented as complementary. Conservatives denounced excessive dependency on the state and occasionally attacked redistribution, but their oratory generally aimed to persuade the electorate that economic freedom was necessary for social-democratic aims.[120] Duncan Sandys, for instance, argued that nationalising further industries would leave Labour unable to pay for social services, whereas by liberating enterprise Conservatives would extend them.[121] Indeed, Amery advised Churchill that this synthesis could unite the campaign's themes: speakers should stress that only the 'unimpeded activities of… our people [could] provide the basic standard'. If these activities were 'held back by the clammy clutch of bureaucratic monopoly… the less there will be to maintain the basic standard…'.[122] Churchill was already on-message though. The 'suggested main theme' for his platform speeches would be 'the choice between two ways of life and the need for liberating individual energies' with the aim of 'illustrat[ing] first on the economic plane, the Socialist way having led to a high cost of living, and in the future threatening our employment and social services'.[123] At least in 1950-1, then, Conservative rhetoric was not riven with contradiction; its theme was that the 'Keynesian and Beveridgite "Attleean settlement"' depended on freedom.[124]

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[119] Waldron Smithers, "*Industrial" or "Magna"CHARter* (London, 1947),13; Law, *Return*, 114-5.

[120] Broadcast, 17 Feb 1950.

[121] C.A.C: CHUR 5/29B, Duncan Sandys Speech, 11 Jan 1950.

[122] C.A.C: CHUR 2/94, Amery to Churchill, 2 Feb 1950.

[123] C.A.C: CHUR 5/29B, 'Notes for Speeches'.

[124] Ramsden, *Churchill,* 167.

For the leadership at least, these arguments formed part of an attempt to redefine Conservatism's task as the reconciliation of liberty with security. Circulated in April 1949, Douglas Jerrold's memorandum, 'Conservatives and the Electorate', shows why Conservatives rejected any automatic tension between freedom and the welfare state.[125] Editor of the *New English Review*, Jerrold argued that his party lacked popular support because it had yet to adapt to the fact that social services now decided elections. However, he insisted that the dilemma facing Conservatives was not how to bribe this electorate begrudgingly with benefits whilst retaining sound finance. Rather 'the basic trouble with Conservative thinking on social policy [was] that it ask[ed] the wrong questions'. Instead of merely outbidding Labour or stressing the necessity of 'economy in administration', Conservatives should bifurcate the advantages of the welfare state from the detrimental effects of socialism on liberty. The problem with national health was 'not how to provide the best doctoring… but how to provide a free national health service which at the same time preserves that the doctor is the servant of the patient and not the State'. Similarly, the issue with benefits was not their affordability, but how 'to reconcile social security with the retention of the necessary incentives'. These quandaries called for reconciliation between individual freedom and the state's ability to regulate and provide services: 'How are we to give the taxpayer's money to the doctors if, in the last resort, we do not control them?' Whereas socialism was founded on the belief there were no valid answers, Conservatism's survival depended on its insistence that there were and on finding 'other means for organising and developing the social services… which would leave the essential liberties intact while providing security'. Crucially, the party's *raison d'être* was reconciliation, not rejection or begrudging tolerance.

[125] Jerrold, 'Conservatives'.

This pursuit of harmony responded to a more complex perception of the electorate and the rhetorical opportunity available to Conservatives. The party 'ought to be exploiting, viz. that people do not like nationalisation *per se*, that they fear regimentation, and that they are profoundly uneasy as to the use which the state is making of the vast powers which it necessarily possesses in order to discharge its responsibilities'. Voters were waiting for Conservatives to show that 'the dilemma provided by the Socialists, that working people must choose between freedom plus unemployment… or bureaucratic socialism, as the price of security… is a false dilemma'.[126] Jerrold identified groups likely to be most receptive to this message: a 'hard-core of the electorate' may be 'indifferent to anything but security', but this was 'emphatically untrue of the black coated worker and of very many, and particularly of the older, trade unionists. It is, in fact, probably untrue of the whole floating vote'.[127]

Maudling and Churchill were eager to attract those voters, and their reactions suggest not only agreement with Jerrold's thesis, but that it encapsulated existing strategy. Maudling summarised Jerrold's 'extremely shrewd' memorandum for Churchill, requested that Butler and Woolton receive copies, and asked if Jerrold would contact CRD with further suggestions. However, Maudling also reassured Churchill that the party's *Right Road for Britain* already encompassed the main points:

> Instead of allowing ourselves to appear as grudging supporters of the new social services, we should declare ourselves firm supporters and further explain to the electorate not only how they can be provided at less expense to the taxpayer, but also that we intend to see how they can be provided without the threat to individual

[126] Jerrold, 'Conservatives', 64; e.g. C.A.C: CHUR 5/27B, Woolton Speech, 11 Oct 1949.

[127] Jerrold, 'Conservatives', 65.

> freedom and responsibility contained in many of the features introduced by the Socialists.[128]

This was a more complicated view of the party's rhetorical opportunity than the mere short-term necessity of a begrudging compromise with Attlee's welfare state. For sure, it was by no means a vision universally shared across the party, but the strategy reflected a leadership already seeking a new rhetorical role within the parameters of the post-war state.

Conclusions

Breaking the link between neoliberalism and emancipatory rhetoric under Churchill suggests the need to reconsider Conservative history throughout the post-war period. Instead of Hayek furnishing the leadership with arguments, the rhetoric of 1945 represented one stage in a longer evolution of inter-war themes and strategies. Yet, having identified that continuity, this article has emphasised the pressures that governed the use and evolution of those inherited rhetorical resources after 1945. Because Senior Conservatives' emancipatory cries now primarily reflected their diagnosis of Britain's economic problems, such rhetoric should not be dismissed as entirely insubstantial. In other contexts, though, it could reflect short-term tactics or act as a temporary solution to the challenges presented by austerity politics. In the immediate post-war period, Liberal votes, the Cold War, and anti-austerity sentiment were important factors encouraging its use, but 'set the people free' was the slogan of a leadership that had also begun to think beyond a reluctant compromise with the welfare state.

This more complex picture of historical specificity and supra-continuity suggests possibilities for reconsidering other periods distorted by the search for neoliberal influence and Thatcherism's origins. Instead of dismissing it as hollow, we could reinterpret

[128] C.A.C: CHUR 2/84A, Maudling to Churchill, 11 Apr 1949.

Macmillan's use of freedom rhetoric as another example of leaders adapting the rhetoric they inherited to meet fresh imperatives – in his case the need to define 'Conservative planning' in the late 1950s. Likewise, Edward Heath's use of apparently 'neoliberal' rhetoric in the late 1960s becomes more understandable once we appreciate that he was repurposing themes that had not yet become the property of the nascent New Right. Equally, we can recognise the New Right's achievement in eventually capturing this heritage and understand Thatcherism as one particularly effective instance of the meaning-capture that previous leaders had each attempted. In this sense, we can reconnect the oratory of the 1970s with the 1930s; the parallel drawn between Thatcher and Churchill's rhetoric turns out to be evidence, not for similar intellectual influences or ideas, but for both leaders working within Conservatism's rhetorical culture.

9,998 words (excl. abstract and titles).